

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Aylesbury Vale Academy

Paradise Orchard Aylesbury Buckinghamshire HP18 0WS

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Diocese	Oxford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Name of academy trust	Aylesbury Vale Academy
Dates of inspection	17-18 July 2018
Date of last inspection	February 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Academy 135879
Executive Principal	Roger Burman
Inspector's name and number	Dr Peter Simpson 192

School context

Aylesbury Vale Academy is a large Church of England academy sponsored by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education. It serves 1380 children and young people aged two to 19 years. Since the last inspection the academy has moved to a new site and incorporates Berryfields Primary School. The proportion of pupils from black or minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language is much higher the national average. The proportion of vulnerable pupils is above the national average. The Executive Principal was appointed with effect from April 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Aylesbury Vale Academy as a Church of England school are satisfactory

- This is an inclusive and rapidly improving academy which serves the needs of pupils of all faiths and those from a non-faith position.
- The teaching of religious education (RE) is good and pupils achieve at least in line with national expectations.
- The academy's recent vision is yet to be fully articulated and currently is not driving the work of the school.
- The academy's values are broadly Christian and can be articulated by pupils. However, they are not fully integrated across the breadth of the academy's work.
- Collective worship is valued by this church academy but is not yet central to its work.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that achievement for pupils is at least in line with the national average in all phases in order to meet the academic needs of learners so all can flourish within a distinctive Christian community.
- Enable the current work on the academy's vision and values to continue so that pupils are clear about the origin of the distinctively Christian values and how they relate to their own lives.
- Establish a review of pupils' involvement in collective worship to encourage greater participation and engagement within this Christian environment.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is satisfactory at meeting the needs of all learners

The academy has gone through a difficult period since the last inspection. However, since April, 2016 upon the appointment of a new executive principal and reshaping of the senior leadership team, significant improvements have been made. Academic outcomes for pupils have improved across the school and there remains a consistent drive for further improvement. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make a good start to their education and this continues in Key Stage 1. By the time pupils leave the primary phase pupil achievement is in line with the national average except for mathematics where it is below national expectations. Results in the secondary phase are below the national average but have made year on year improvements. Progress tracking demonstrates that the attainment pupils in Year 11 is on track to be an improvement on 2017. Parents are supportive of the improvements and the academy's drive for excellence.

There is a clear focus on the academy's Christian values of faith, respect, equality, aspiration, creativity and service in the primary phase. This is because they are clearly articulated and used as a focus for acts of worship, display and themed work. In the secondary phase the values are more implicit with the focus being on removing disadvantage and barriers to learning. Pupils in all phases know the values but do not necessarily attribute them to their Christian origins or how they apply to their own lives. The academy has recently reviewed and revised its vision statement to, 'Everyone is a lifelong learner'. It aims 'to create an achievement climate where each individual can be an active participant in their learning and have opportunities to flourish'. This is yet to have an influence on pupils' thinking.

Pupils from diverse backgrounds and cultures work together in a harmonious environment with the adults who support them. Behaviour is generally good, both in lessons and outside structured learning. Pupils are keen to describe the improvements they have witnessed, particularly in the secondary phase. Attendance is below the national average whilst fixed term exclusions in the secondary phase is above the national average. However, this is reducing as the impact of new policies takes effect. Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good and is supported well by the academy. They have a clear understanding of right from wrong and social justice. They have both an understanding and empathy for the cultural and religious beliefs of major world faiths which they treat with respect. Spiritual development is supported through collective worship and RE, enabling pupils' personal reflection regardless of their own particular faith. The teaching in RE and the programmes of study followed make a significant contribution to pupils' understanding of world faiths and to the academy's Christian values.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

Increasing value is being placed upon collective worship across the entire age range of the academy. In the primary phase pupils experience whole school, key stage and class worship. Worship is centred around key themes which are linked to a biblical context which is set for the whole term. For example, during the spring term the worship was linked to a verse in St Matthew's Gospel, 'Turn back to God! The Kingdom of Heaven is near'. In the secondary phase worship is arranged for year groups and each of the three college groups. Recently a 'Thought for the Week' has been introduced which is prepared by the academy chaplain and led by form tutors. This thought for the week encourages small group discussion and personal reflection on the academy's values using contemporary examples available in the media. For example, pupils reflected upon faith and prayer using a podcast of the rescue of the children from a cave in Thailand. This approach is valued by pupils.

Services to celebrate the major Christian festivals are led by the chaplain, who is the pioneer minister in the locality. This provides pupils with an experience of the Anglican traditions. He, together with key staff, has a major role in the planning and leading of worship across the academy. Leaders from other faiths are invited appropriately to contribute to the worship programme.

Collective worship, which is distinctly Christian, is sensitively developed in this school which serves a richly diverse community. Pupils represent a number of major world religions and those from a non-faith background. A recent evaluation of worship involving pupils has enabled the leaders to focus again on worship across the academy and to consider some of the next steps. Most pupils are currently passive observers in worship and many do not relate the experience to their everyday lives and behaviours. Pupils do not have a major role in the planning or leading of worship.

The academy has introduced prayer spaces which are more established in the primary phase. These enable pupils to reflect on some of life's 'big questions' whatever their own faith. This is a developing area which those planning and leading worship are keeping under review. There are few places in the academy for quiet personal reflection during the school day.

Collective worship makes a valuable contribution to spiritual development providing time for private prayer and reflection. Pupils in the secondary phase have a clear Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and talk about the Trinity with confidence. Moral, social and cultural development is supported through themes and reflections which challenge pupils' thinking and provide them with an understanding of how they should behave and act towards others.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE is well planned following the Oxford Diocesan Guidelines in the primary phase and the AQA syllabus for those pupils in the secondary phase. This provides a clear framework which enables the majority pupils to achieve in line with national expectations. RE outcomes for secondary pupils are above the average for other subjects in the school. There are weekly lessons in the primary and latter part of the secondary phase, whilst in Years 7-9 the school uses a programme of tutor-led sessions supplemented by 'Drop Down' days, which enable pupils to spend some quality time conducting detailed study. Work in class lessons is clearly matched to the ability of pupils who thrive on the challenge with which they are presented. Effective marking of work ensures that pupils have a clear understanding of the quality of their work and what they need to do to make it even better. All pupils are able to follow lines of enquiry, both learning about and from religions. For example, they study a range of world religions and use what they have learned to formulate their own ideas on how the beliefs of other cultures and religions affect their lives in a multi-cultural society. Pupils enjoy their lessons, appreciating the different teaching styles which may include preparing dramatic or other presentations for their peers.

The effective and knowledgeable subject leaders correctly judge the overall quality of RE to be good and have a genuine ambition to drive further improvements. The planning for primary and secondary pupils is still rather compartmentalised. The benefits of a more cohesive planning structure to develop greater continuity and progression for learners have yet to be realised.

RE makes a significant contribution to the moral, social and cultural development of pupils. This can be seen through pupils' harmonious and respectful interactions with each other, regardless of each other's faith or culture.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is satisfactory

The academy has been through a period of great change and great challenge especially since its Ofsted inspection in November 2016 when it was judged to have serious weaknesses. Since that time the executive principal and the whole leadership team across both primary and secondary phases have demonstrated a relentless drive for improving the educational outcomes for all children and young people. They have a commitment to improving the life chances for all pupils and to removing disadvantage so that they can flourish in a challenging world. Pupils' academic and personal achievement has improved through a rigorous approach to teaching and learning and through targeted interventions which have enabled them to experience success. Outcomes in the primary phase are approaching the national average overall whilst in the secondary phase improvements are having a real impact year on year. However, attainment and progress are still below that found nationally.

The academy's vision statement has recently been amended and it is not yet driving the educational improvements. Whilst the academy's values are central to and consistent with the overarching principle of ensuring all pupils achieve their best in all areas of school life, they do not explicitly drive improvement. Governors and the academy sponsor are rigorous in monitoring and evaluating the achievements at the school. This includes the promoting of the distinctive Christian character and providing a good level of appropriate challenge to the senior leaders. Planning for further improvement is robust and well-monitored and evaluated. There is a separate action plan to support the development of the academy's Christian character which ensures that there is appropriate emphasis on the academy's mission as an Anglican school. All staff are well supported and challenged receiving appropriate professional development to both enable them to fulfil their current roles and to prepare them for future senior roles.

Leadership of the distinctive Christian character of the school is driven by the headteacher of the primary school with the full support of the senior team. Leadership of RE is effective and is provided by the deputy headteacher of the primary school and a senior leader in the secondary phase. Statutory requirements for RE and collective worship are being met. The academy has a strong partnership with the Diocese of Oxford which provides appropriate targeted support across a range of improvement areas. The leaders of the academy, led by the executive principal, have provided secure and rapid improvement over the last two years which has had considerable success so that the academy is well-positioned for further improvement. The leadership team has demonstrable capacity for bringing about further improvement in the academy.